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# International communication as an alternative marketing tool: A study of consumers' response to face-to-face marketing activities of telecommunication firms in south-eastern in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This work studies the trend that has seen Nigerian telecommunications service providers prominently employing face-to-face marketing alongside other marketing platforms as they compete for customer patronage in the country. Placed within the media richness theory, the objectives of the study are: to find out how much the face-to-face marketing activities of telecommunications firms reach the consumers, to assess the extent to which the telecommunications firms may have succeeded in enlarging their customer base in via face-to-face marketing; and to find out how much role face-to-face marketing may have played in strengthening loyalty to the telecommunications brands among consumers. Within the context of South-Eastern Nigeria, these objectives yielded three research questions. Designed as a qualitative research, two focus group discussion sessions were conducted. Findings showed that there is significant exposure to face-to-face marketing communication of the telecoms firms in the South-Eastern Nigeria; however, this communication appears to have been more effective in strengthening the loyalty of existing customers than it has been in attracting new customers for the telecoms firms. It is concluded that face-to-face marketing would be a viable alternative for customer base building and maintaining customer relations; even though there are intervening variables that enhance or undermine its strength.

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## 1. Introduction

Communication is at the heart of all human activities (Baran, 2010), and marketing is not an exception (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012). Among the various marketing activities is advertising which employs communication to create publicity and persuasion around a product or service with the view to achieving consumer patronage. Advertising communication could be done via the mass media or interpersonal channels or both depending on the circumstances of specific markets and the objectives of the advertiser.

In Nigeria, the story of advertising experience cannot be completely told without the mention of the local telecommunications sector where advertising has become a very prominent element of marketing, as competing service providers spend millions of dollars in advertising campaigns yearly (Ifeanyi, 2014). Nigeria telecommunication industry experienced significant growth through the introduction of Global System of Mobile (GSM) communication in the year 2001. This marked the beginning of an era of massive availability of mobile phone lines and Internet penetration as newly licensed private operators increasingly churn out their products to a newfound market. Today, major service providers in the country include Airtel, MTN, Globacom and Etisalat (Emerah *et al*, 2013).

These service providers now find themselves in a competitive market where each one strives to use every marketing communication strategy at their disposal to reach, inform and persuade Nigerians about their brand. Implicated in this strategy is the question of which medium would best serve the marketing process. While these service providers have heavily employed the mass media, face-to-face communication has equally been prominently integrated (Ifeanyi, 2014).

But given the enormous powers attributed to the mass media particularly in terms of their reach (Baran 2010), why would these firms budget considerable amounts of money in pursuit of face-to-face marketing? Perhaps this question only further underscores the need to research into those likely capabilities of face-to-face communication that might have made it a desirable option in marketing.

Besides, research evidence (such as Kola and Akinyele 2010; Bolatito 2011; Nwankwo, Aboh, Obi, Agu and Sydney-Agbor 2013) generally affirms that advertising has indeed been an effective marketing tool for customer acquisition and retention in the Nigeria's telecommunication industry. And given the growing transformational role of the telecommunication sector in Nigeria's economy – 'its contribution to GDP stands at 7.05 % in 2012 and 8.53% in 2013' (Osugwu 2013, p. 2) – a research of this nature into one of its key catalyst (i.e. advertising) becomes relevant.

The study also promises to enrich scholarship in relation to marketing in the Nigerian telecommunications sector. There is yet a research gap in the area of the role of face-to-face marketing in the industry. Previous studies conducted by Ajiboye, Adu and Wojuad, (2007); Oyeniyi and Abiodun, (2010); Adeleke and Aminu, (2012), Aneme, (2013) on advertising effect in the industry had dwelt on different subjects.

## **2. Literature Review**

Primarily, this literature review was conducted through accessing and assessment of numerous journal articles, textbooks, academic websites, national statistics/fact booklets and independent research reports. The journal articles were found useful particularly for the purpose of gaining insight into the related empirical studies on the Nigerian telecommunications sector. The same thing applies to other non-journal Internet academic articles. The journals, about 30 in number, were accessed via the University of Greenwich online journal database like Sage, Emerald and Google Scholar electronic databases. These empirical research sources (journals and non-journal articles) were published within the last 15 years – a deliberately chosen criterion aimed at maximizing recentness and reflecting the age of the liberalized Nigerian telecommunications industry (about 15 years). The key words for the searches include Communication, Face-to-Face Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Machine-Assisted/Mass Media, Consumers Satisfaction, Consumers Trust and Loyalty, Customers Retention Marketing, Nigerian Telecommunication Sector and Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The Social Sciences Citation Index (ASCI) were employed.

Further, textbooks personally procured and searched for in the University of Greenwich and British library catalogues were utilized for this review particularly in the area of conceptual discourses and theories. Finally, national statistics/fact booklets and independent body research/survey report were considered, accessed and assessed to gain proper insight from what others have done, appreciate the volume of investment in the Nigeria Telecommunication sector and obtain knowledge on the figures relevant to the study. This exercise enables the researcher to gain better and in-depth understanding on how different authors approached their work and how best to conduct the review. All these literature materials were desk reviewed and most were accepted; the acceptance was based on the extent of their relevance to the subject of study.

## **2.1. An Over view of Nigeria's Telecommunications Market**

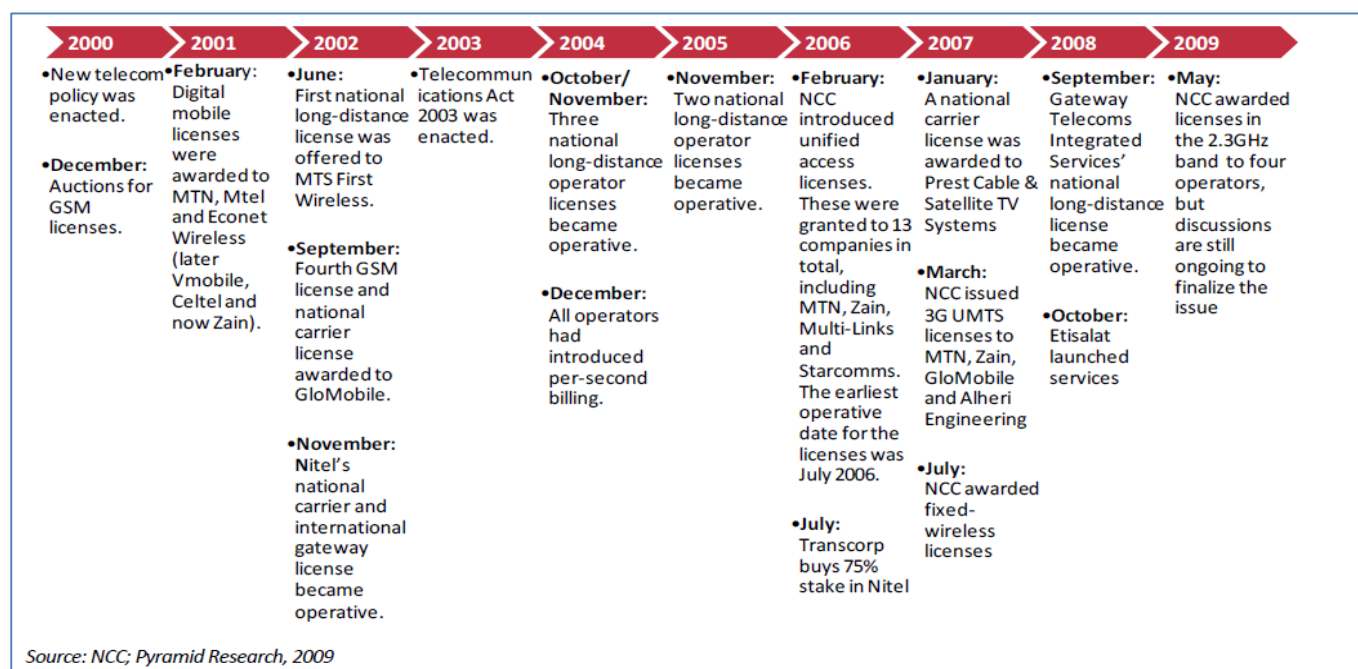
Like with her many other modern socio-economic structures, Nigeria's telecommunications sector has its roots in British colonialism (Juwah, 2011; Ige, 2012; Emerah, Oyedele and David, 2013). According to Ige (2012, p.17), 'the colonial government had created a department that offered posts and telegraphy/telephone services for the colony'. But it was in 1851 that the government established a post office in Lagos, and by 1856, a UK firm, Cable and Wireless Company commissioned a submarine cable to link Lagos and London. However, telecommunications facilities were first installed in what was to become Nigeria in 1886 by the British colonial government with the arrival of public telegraph services connecting Lagos via submarine cable through other West African countries of Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia and ended up in England (Juwah, 2011; Ige, 2012; Emerah, Oyedele and David, 2013).

But after more than a century, a landmark was reached in the evolution of the telecommunications sector in Nigeria with the enactment of the Act 75 of 1992 establishing the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), a technical body to regulate telecommunications in the country; a responsibility which before now was carried out by a government ministry. This action naturally resulted in the separation of the policy formulating responsibility of the ministry from both the operating and regulatory activities in the telecommunications sector (Juwah, 2011; Ige, 2012).

However, deregulation of the sector took off in earnest with the licensing of the first set of private telephone operators, thus effectively ending NITEL's many years of monopoly. Emerah, Oyedele and David (2013, p.1) capture this development as follows:

"The licensing of the three GSM operators in July 2001; Econet wireless communication Limited (now Airtel), MTN Limited and MTEL Limited brought a restored hope to the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians. The fourth GSM mobile operator, Globacom was licensed in September 2002. In the National Telecommunication policy of Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC), it was targeted that the sector (GSM) should attain 1.2 million subscribers within three years."

Juwah (2011, p.2) describes this era of liberalization as the "most eventful period" in "historical evolution of the Nigerian telecommunications."



**Figure 1**

Milestones in licensing and concessions awarded by NCC, 2000-2009

The impact of the deregulation of the Nigeria's telecommunications sector was immediate and transforming. It led to a 'phenomenal degree of telephone and Internet penetration' in the country (Juwah 2011, p.3). According to the Executive Vice Chairman of Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, Dr Eugene Juwah, 'investment in the telecommunications industry has soared above \$25 billion, growth in the ICT sector is at 30% between 2011 and 2013, while its contribution to GDP was 7.05 % in 2012 and 8.53% in 2013' (Osuagwu 2013, p. 2). Thus, "in terms of growth, Nigeria is ranked the largest and fastest growing telecom market in Africa and among the ten fastest telecommunication growth markets in the world, an indication of its robustness to return on investments" (Juwah 2011, p. 3 – 4).

Independent research conducted in 2010 by Pyramid research shows that in telecommunication sector contribute significant amount to the economies of Nigeria after oil and gas sector and above transportation, finance and government services sectors. Particularly, revenue from mobile service was estimated to have contributed an average of 4.2% to the gross domestic product in 10 African markets in 2009. Further, findings from Pyramid Research show that the total revenue generated by mobile operators in Nigeria has significantly increased from \$135m in 2001 to approximately \$7.0bn in 2008. However, in 2009, the revenue declined by 6% to be US\$6.6bn.

| Year | MTN                                                                                                                                                                       | zoIn                                                                                                                   | glo                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | mtel                                                                                                                                                                         | etisalat | Starcomms | visafone |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 2001 | February: Was awarded digital mobile GSM license by the NCC at a cost of \$285m.<br>May: Launched commercial services on May 16, 2001, in Port Harcourt, Lagos and Abuja. | February: Awarded digital mobile GSM license by the NCC at a cost of \$285m.<br>August: Launched commercial services.  | NA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | February: Awarded digital mobile GSM license by the NCC at a cost of \$285m.<br>Mtel merged with Nitel.                                                                      | NA       | NA        | NA       |
| 2002 | NA                                                                                                                                                                        | NA                                                                                                                     | September: Glo Mobile was awarded digital mobile license at a cost of \$200m as part of its multiple licenses (national carrier services, mobile services, long-distance communications and fixed wireless services). Also was issued international gateway and national carrier license alongside Nitel. | First attempt to privatize Nitel/Mtel, but the preferred bidder, UK-based investment International Limited, failed to pay for the 51% stake.                                 | NA       | NA        | NA       |
| 2003 | December: Third operator to introduce per-second billing.                                                                                                                 | November: Introduced per-second billing.<br>December: Vodacom won court case over acquisition of Econet Wireless.      | August: Launched commercial services over 2.5G network.<br>Became first operator to introduce per-second billing.                                                                                                                                                                                         | April: Appointment of Pentascope to manage Nitel/Mtel.<br>December: Mtel rolled out GSM services to the capital cities of all 36 states. Also introduced per-second billing. | NA       | NA        | NA       |
| 2004 | NA                                                                                                                                                                        | April: Econet rebranded to Vee Networks (was trading as V-Mobile) after acquisition of a controlling stake by Vodacom. | Glo Mobile introduces GPRS with WAP. In just nine months of service, Glo Mobile became the fastest growing mobile operator, with 1m subscribers across 60 municipalities.<br>August: Announced plans to invest in fiber-optic submarine cable.                                                            | June: Second privatization attempt commenced.                                                                                                                                | NA       | NA        | NA       |

Source: Pyramid Research; operators

| Year | MTN                                                                                                                                          | Zain                                                                                                                                                                           | Glo                                                                                                                                               | Mitel                                                                                                         | Etisalat                                                                                                                                                           | Starcomms                                                                                                                                           | visafone                                                                                                                                           |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2005 | September: Rolled out GPRS services.                                                                                                         | NA                                                                                                                                                                             | September: Rolled out GPRS/GSM services.                                                                                                          | Pentascopie contact was cancelled.<br>May: Mtel's subscriber total peaked at 1.2m and its market share at 8%. | NA                                                                                                                                                                 | NA                                                                                                                                                  | NA                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2006 | NA                                                                                                                                           | May: Celtel International acquired majority stake (65%) in Vee Mobile.<br>September: Re-branded to Celtel.                                                                     | NA                                                                                                                                                | Majority stake (51%) in Nitel was sold to Transcorp.                                                          | NA                                                                                                                                                                 | March: Launched fixed-wireless services based on CDMA and 3G EVDO mobile broadband data service.<br>May: Awarded unified license by the NCC.        | NA                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2007 | March/April: Was awarded a 3G UMTS license for a 10MHz block in the 2GHz band at a cost of \$150m.<br>May: First test call for 3G completed. | March/April: Was awarded 3G UMTS license for a 10MHz block in the 2GHz band at a cost of \$150m.                                                                               | March/April: Was awarded 3G UMTS license for a 10MHz block in the 2GHz band at a cost of \$150m.                                                  | NA                                                                                                            | January: Was issued a unified access license by the NCC (GSM 900/1800MHz bands) at a price of \$400m.<br>September: Etisalat acquired 40% of Mubadala Development. | June: Acquired Cellcom.<br>August: Awarded unified access license (800MHz spectrum) by the NCC, which allows it to offer fixed and mobile services. | September: Crossed the 1m subscribers landmark after six months and 2.5m after 10 months.                                                          |
| 2008 | May: Launched DVB-H TV service.                                                                                                              | August: Celtel was rebranded as Zain following the global acquisition of Celtel International by MTC.                                                                          | August: Hit the 20m-subscriber mark.<br>September: Launched Internet packages over 3G-plus network.                                               | February: Transcorp shares were suspended from the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE).                             | March: First official call on the network.<br>October: Launched commercial operations in Nigeria.                                                                  | July: Starcomms listed on the Nigerian stock exchange.<br>November: Reached the 2m subscribers mark.                                                | February: Launched voice SMS service and introduced free late-night calls.<br>July: Agreed with Nokia to introduce dual-band mobile CDMA handsets. |
| 2009 | June: Launched IP-based connectivity.                                                                                                        | February: Zain launched 3G service in Nigeria.<br>April: Announced plans to migrate to all-IP network.<br>October: Signed network management deal with Nokia Siemens Networks. | January: Reduced international call rates by 70%.<br>October: Announced expansion of its network coverage to 86 predominantly remote communities. | February: Transcorp started divesting its stake in Nitel.                                                     | April: Raised N15bn in a private placement.<br>June: Subscribers hit 1m mark seven months after it launched operations.                                            | February: Introduced missed-call notification service and call waiting.                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                    |

Source: Pyramid Research; operators

**Figure 2**  
Key activities and milestones by mobile operator, 2001-2009

Despite all this growth in the telecommunication market in Nigeria, the sector remains challenged by a number of hindrances. Prominent amongst them are poor service, high cost of services and the inability of service providers to cover the length and breadth of the country (Omo-Ettu and Sesan; 2007).

Notwithstanding, the telecommunication market in Nigeria is a very competitive one largely due to the fact that no one firm enjoys monopoly in the sector any more (Omo-Ettu and Sesan, 2007; Juwah, 2013). Someone coming into the country for the first time cannot be left in any doubt that service providers in the sector are locked in a fierce competition for profits as such a person is immediately confronted by a barrage of advertisements beginning from the airport and all the way into the cities and rural areas where virtually every spot is dotted with billboard messages belonging to one service provider or the other. Then, the person does not have to listen to radio or watch television for too long to get his/her first "harassment" by telecommunications adverts that come on air from time to time and in quick succession. Such is the vibrancy of the market that this sector has become the leading advertising spender in Nigeria as reported by Ifeanyi (2014, p. 1):

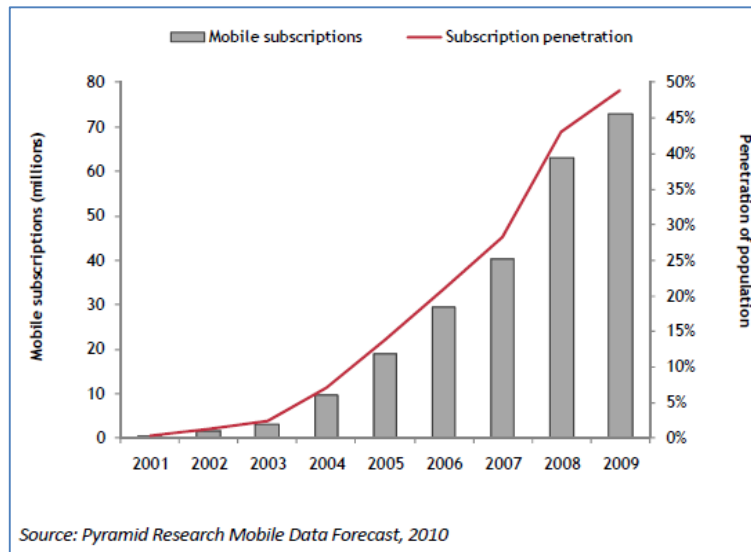
“Local telecommunications companies were the biggest advertising spenders in 2013. This is according to a survey by MediareachOMD, a specialist media company that provides media planning, buying, control and inventory management services. According to the survey, the top 20 products that generated more advertisements during the year include: telecommunications, personal paid announcements, lager, gaming/entertainment, corporate, banking/finance, and religion. The report noted that telecoms companies continued to be the highest advert spenders with overall spends of N14.7 billion (14 percent) of the total advertising in 2013. MTN, Etisalat, Glo and Airtel were specifically mentioned as the top ten biggest advert spenders in the year under review”.

Arguably, the telecommunication companies have been reaping the benefits of their investments in advertising. Evidence of this could be found in a number of studies (such as Kola and Akinyele, 2010; Bolatito, 2011; Nwankwo, Aboh, Obi, Agu and Sydney-Agbor, 2013) which have shown that advertising has indeed been an effective marketing tool in the Nigeria's telecommunication industry.

In the Nigeria's telecommunications sector, advertising constitutes an important aspect of marketing activities. Competing firms employ both the mass media and interpersonal channels to get their messages to the consumers and potential consumers. While the mass media (radio, television and print) are in the mainstream of these activities, interpersonal communication is being increasingly relied on as an alternative platform (Ifeanyi, 2014). This is apparently as a result of the market realities that have

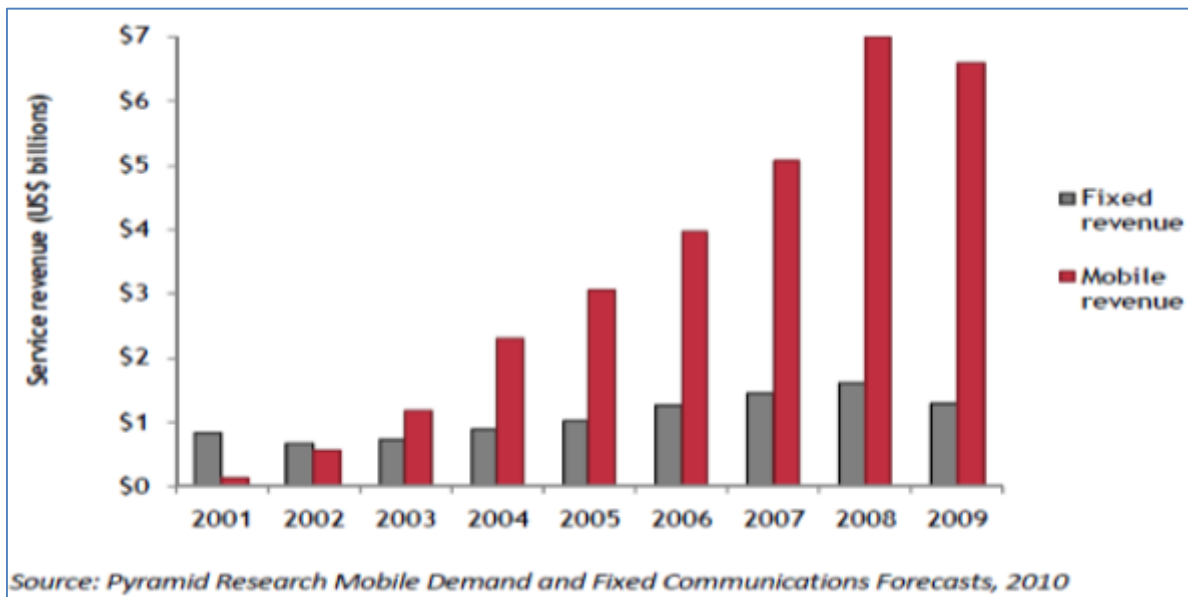


compelled telecommunication firms to explore other more direct and more personal means of speaking to the audience as increasing competition progressively makes their attention a scarce commodity.



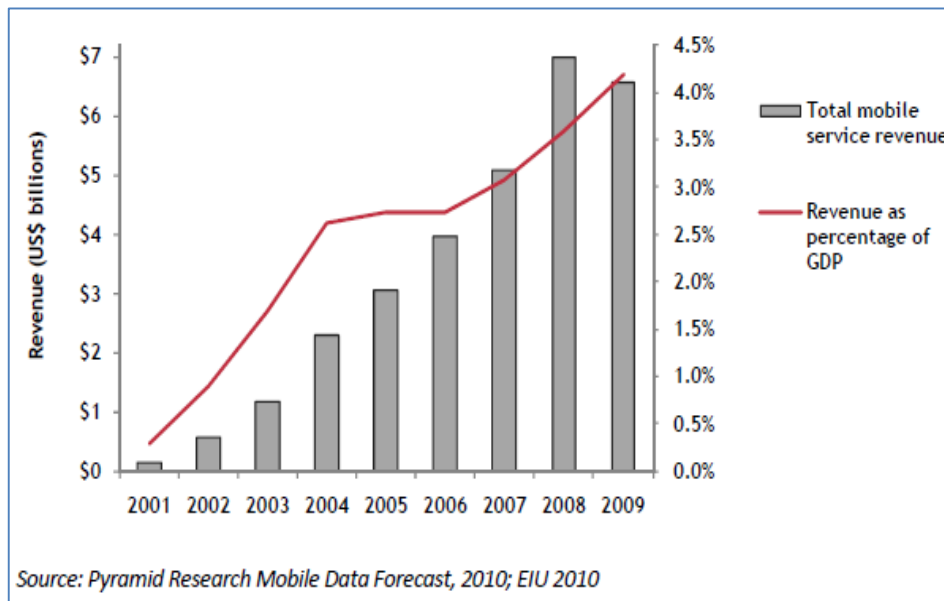
**Figure 3**

Mobile subscriptions and mobile subscriptions penetration of population in Nigeria, 2001 - 2009

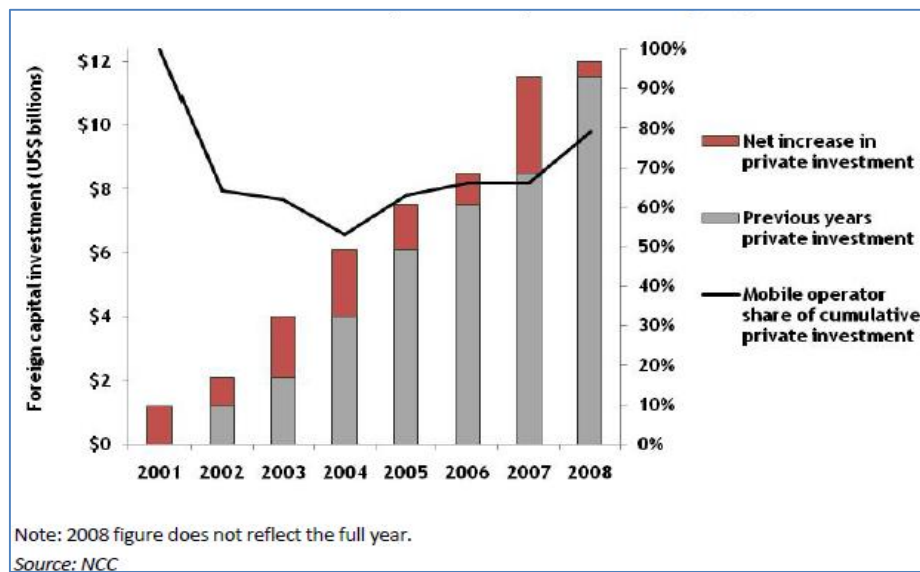


**Figure 4**

Fixed and mobile service revenues in Nigeria, 2001 - 2009



**Figure 5**  
Mobile services revenue contribution to GDP in Nigeria, 2001-2009



**Figure 6**  
Private investment by Telecom operator in Nigeria, 2001 - 2008

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

The Media Richness Theory offers an apt theoretical prism through which to consider face-to-face interpersonal communication as a marketing tool. This theory considers the strength (richness) of a given medium as the determinant of how effective the message communicated through it will be. It postulates that “each media type has its own advantages and disadvantages and each is probably more appropriate than the others in different situations” – hence, “one should choose the media type that offers the greatest efficiency and the greatest opportunity for the intended message to be conveyed accurately” (Agba 2002, p. 197).

Citing Daft and Lengel (1986), Miles (2012) identifies four factors that influence media richness as: the ability of a given medium to generate immediacy, convey several cues, language variation and personal focus of the medium. Based exactly on these criteria, the theory considers face-to-face contact the richest of the communication medium given the cues it projects (Montoya et al, 2009; Miles, 2012). Hence the theory claims that face-to-face communication enables participants to communicate better, understand vague/equivocal messages, resolve uncertainties in tasks and ultimately build relationship. Next in order of richness are video communication and telephone. The lowest is electronic communication like e-mail and mass media (Miles, 2012).

A very important factor that goes in favour of face-to-face communication as being a “rich” medium is its greater amenability to interaction; two-way interactivity. The transactional model of communication brings this strength into focus. The model contrasts the linear/one-way model of communication by the fact that it recognizes communication as a simultaneous process with “presence and effects of both feedback and context” (Gamble et al 2014, p.13). It therefore switched both the terms ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ to ‘communicator’. The model places face-to-face interpersonal communication as a marketing tool that integrates the activities of both the advertiser (firm) and the consumer as against some other forms of advertising communication that could be sender-centered, while giving little or no consideration to the complementary role played by the receiver (consumer) in determining the advertising effectiveness.

This model excludes all sorts of communication dictatorship as well as recognizes the sender and the receiver as being in a sort of cooperation (collaboration) towards clarifying meaning and agreeing on a position. Therefore, it suggests that a marketer’s communication is not seen as automatically fruitful without considering what the consumer thinks, understands, believes and wants. This model underlies

any kind of marketing that seeks to engage the consumer in a face-to-face personal interaction as against a one-way message delivered via radio, TV, newspaper or billboard.

However, given that the theory concurs that “each media type has its own advantages and disadvantages and each is probably more appropriate than the others in different situations”, (Agba 2002, pg. 197), it remains to be seen how face-to-face communication would remain the “richest” medium in all situations. To assert this, apparently, would amount to contradicting the theory itself. Thus, one may ask: Even if face-to-face communication has been a rich medium under certain communication situations, would this necessarily be replicated in all other situations? If face-to-face communication has been effective in corporate communication, will it be in marketing communication? If it has been fruitful in one instance of marketing, will it be in another instant (such as the one done by telecommunication firms in Nigeria)? This constitutes some form of research gap.

Little wonder that studies on media richness have produced conflicting results. For instance, researches by George and Robb (2008) and Van Deursen and Pieterse (2006) have argued that media richness theory does not substantially expound why face-to-face communication is richer/superior to other forms of communication for carrying out activities. They recognize that the concept of media richness was developed at a stage when modern communication technologies, such as the email, were not such popular means of communication and further identified additional criteria for media richness that would take into account the potential of modern communication technologies. These criteria include: multiple addressability, externally recordable, computer processable memory and concurrency. But the validity of this assertion may require to be further tested given that face-to-face communication has, up till this era of modern communication technologies, continued to play a major role in an industry like the Nigerian telecommunication sector despite ample availability of “modern communication technologies.”

However, in an attempt to furnish a stronger basis for adjudging face-to-face communication as the richest, Kock (2002) and Kock (2005) expands the media richness theory by proposing what he terms the media naturalness hypothesis. Employing evidence from evolutionary biology, this new paradigm argues that face-to-face communication is more in tune with human nature (natural adaptation of the *homo sapiens*), and that the more artificial tools (such as electronic medium) are deployed in aid of human communication, the communication process is progressively alienated from human natural dispositions; its naturalness is increasingly undermined, thus harming its effectiveness. Kock (2002, p.2) contends that “a decrease in the degree of naturalness of a communication medium (or its degree

of similarity to the face-to-face medium) leads to the following effects in connection with a communication interaction: (1) increased cognitive effort, (2) increased communication ambiguity, and (3) decreased physiological arousal.”

But Van der Kleij *et al.* (2009) opine that effectiveness of a given activities such as persuasion/negotiation is not subjected to the medium selected and rich communication is not factored on a rich medium. Furthermore, Wakefield *et al* (2008) demonstrated evidence, which indicate that through continuous use of lean/machine-assisted media, the medium can become richer and effective as face-to-face communication. However, Montoya *et al* (2009) noted the effective usage of lean/machine-assisted media might not simply depend on whether the technology is obtainable but how firms and culture adapt to technological change. These arguments strengthened and brought about the adaptations of MRT, such as Media Synchronicity Theory. The Media Synchronicity Theory as noted by Dennis and Valacich (1999) is an adaptation of MRT that highlights the strengths and overwhelming capacities of modern lean/machine assisted media, which create efficiencies that matches face-to-face communication.

If this is so, then the question would remain: what are those variables and in what way may they influence the richness or leanness of face-to-face communication in a context like presented by marketing in the Nigerian telecommunication industry?

### **2.3. Face-To-Face Communication and Marketing**

Admittedly, direct face-to-face dialogue “has long been known to be the most effective form of communication. It still has its place in non-profit and private business” (D’Ambrosio 2012, p. 1). Basically, it talks directly to a person and does not speak to a “nameless” crowd; its message has an identified and a definite personal target for whom the message has been specifically framed. On the other hand, however, face-to-face interpersonal communication is limited by the fact that it lacks the reach and simultaneity of machine-assisted/mass communication. In other words, it cannot collectively engage a large audience scattered over vastly separated geographical spaces (Patil, 2013).

In discussing the role of face-to-face interpersonal communication in marketing in Nigerian telecommunication industry, this review will interrogate the key concepts that form consumer relationship and resolve consumer uncertainties/conflicts. As espoused by marketing literatures, these variables chiefly include consumer satisfaction, consumer retention and consumer/brand trust and loyalty.

## **2.4. Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction is a critical marketing construct that denotes how fulfilled a customer is about a service/product offering of a firm. It further implies an assessment of experience by a customer on how far his/her expectations over the functionality of a firm's service/product were met (Lancaster and Massingham, 2011).

Studies by Adegaju (2008) and Ogbojafor, Ladipo, Ighomereho and Odunewu (2014) focusing on Nigerian telecommunication sector have identified key determinants of customer satisfaction as reliability, responsiveness, competence, accessibility, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowledge of customer and tangibility of services/product offered by firm. These findings, considered against the backdrop of the theoretical analysis made above, further strengthen the thesis that while "richness" of a medium matters, there are other variables that influence effective marketing communication. In this case, customer satisfaction becomes a function of not just the strength of the medium but also of some of these other variables identified above. This definitely makes a case for empirical investigation.

## **2.5. Customer Trust and Loyalty**

Customer trust and loyalty as a key marketing construct is a product of how satisfied a customer is over firm's products/services (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Higher satisfaction has been linked to greater loyalty (Lancaster and Massingham, 2011) and ultimately, customer trust. This therefore suggests that in a competitive marketplace, unsatisfied customers would be unwilling to trust and be loyal.

Supporting the import of trust in explaining customer satisfaction, relationship and loyalty, Sirdeshmukh *et al.* (2002) submit that in business to customer context, trust is determined and achieved given two components – performance and benevolence. While performance focuses on the quality, effectiveness and efficiencies of service provided, benevolence looks at the manner with which firms attends to customers, resolve difficulties and offer feedbacks.

For optimal trust and loyalty, Morgan and Hunt (1994) propose utilization of communication tools (whether face-to-face or/and mass/machine assisted communication) before, during and after transactions. Ultimately, service providers who try to provide information via communication medium in such a way that customer got a personal touch and benefit with less stress in decoding contents, are most likely to satisfy customer, build relationship, enhance trust and achieve customer loyalty. Studies

by Lemon *et al.* (2001) and Allen and Wilburn (2002) provide suggestion that support the key roles of personal relationship, personalization and customization in achieving loyalty. Admittedly, "personalization" may better be achieved using face-to-face communication than using some other less intimate media of communication. But to what extent can this be in the face some other determining variables? For instance, studies by Adeleke and Aminu (2012), Aneme (2013) and Ogbojafor *et al.* (2014) show that customer loyalty in Nigerian telecommunications market is significantly influenced by factors such as service quality, customer satisfaction, corporate image and price/tariff.

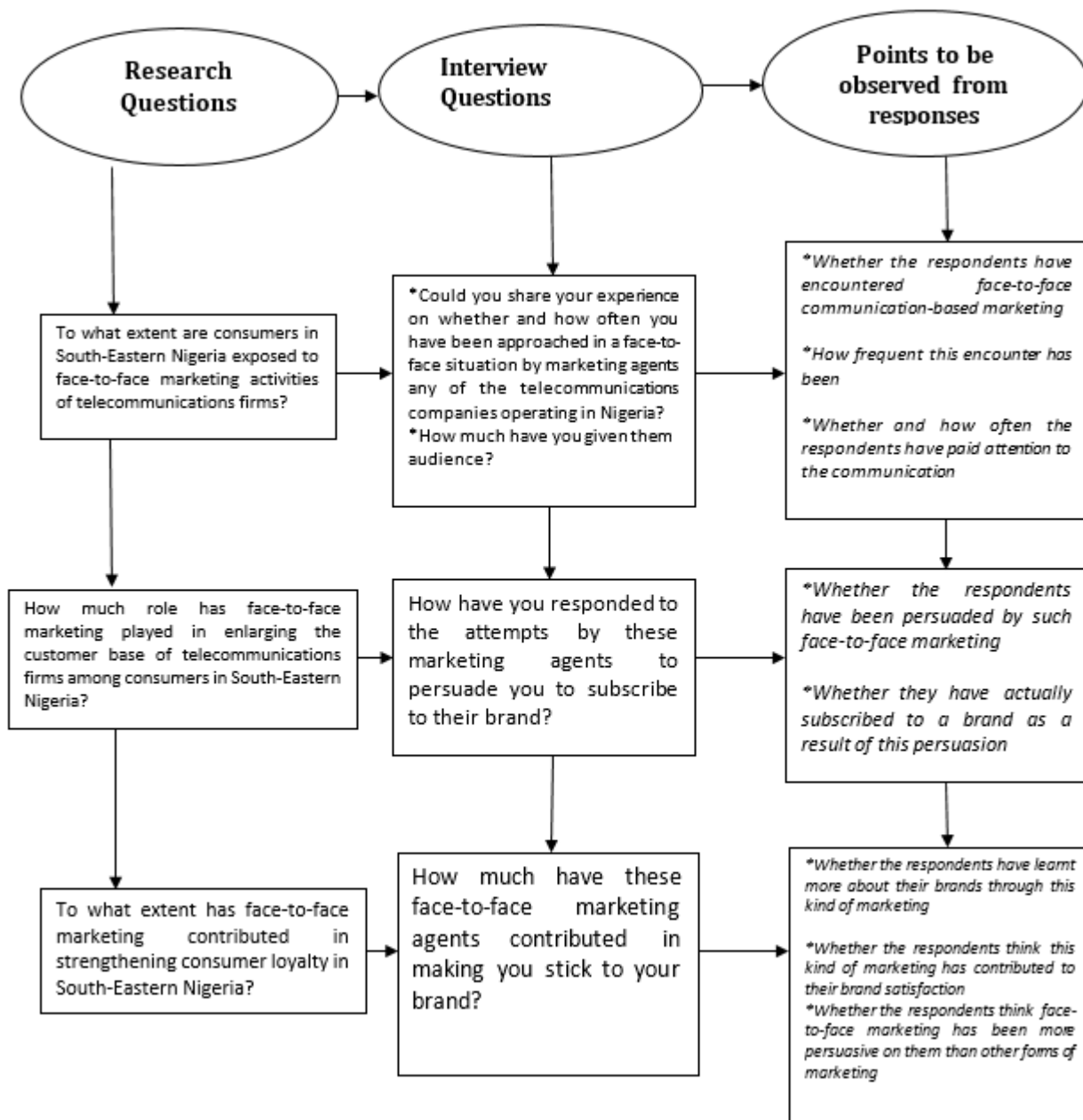
## **2.6. Customer Retention**

Customer retention is now increasingly seen as a vital managerial issue with capacity to deliver greater relationship economics given a context of competitive market with a lower growth of the number of new customer and capacity (Ahmad et al, 2002). Customer retention denotes the activities undertaken by a firm to avoid customer defection to competitors. It is an outcome of customer satisfaction usually achieved through excellent customer service (Zeithaml, 2000).

Historically, customers are seen as homogenous prospective buyers with predictable same needs that are channeled through firm's distributors (Shostack, 1997). However, the trend has changed given the inadequacy of the approach that limits its engagement in emerging competitive markets (Lancaster and Massingham, 2011). With the high rate of losing customers, firms began to seek new ways to acquire, retain and expand business (Potter, 1994). This led to the emergence of firms maintaining long term relationship with customers (Ahmad et al, 2002), ultimately ensuring quality service and that medium through which customers are interacted with has the needed capacity to respond efficiently and effectively to their needs.

The situation in the Nigerian telecommunications sector is not far from the above scenario. The industry is a very competitive one as a result of multiplicity of service providers (Omo-Ettu and Sesan, 2007; Juwah, 2013; Ifeanyi, 2014). No one is too certain of gaining new customers and so everyone is keen to retain any single customer it has already secured. The use of face-to-face communication in their marketing may be seen as one of the ways in which the competing service providers have responded to this challenge. However, since all the service providers seem to have keyed into this strategy, can it still be of any significant advantage to anyone of the? If so, why and how?

Perhaps, one may attempt this question by still pointing out that there are other factors that would influence how successful a firm becomes with face-to-face communication as a strategy in maintaining an enduring relationship (customer retention). Thus, face-to-face communication strategy may have to negotiate with these factors, which as has been seen above include quality of service, customer satisfaction and tariff. Interestingly, the study by Oyeniyi and Abiodun (2010) reveals that switching cost equally plays a significant role in customer retention.



**Figure 7**

Research questions, interview questions and points to observe



This review has interrogated the role face-to-face communication as a marketing strategy could play in a market like the Nigerian telecommunications sector within the conceptual framework of the media richness theory. Analysis of the theory and other relevant literature - conceptual and empirical - tends to suggest that face-to-face communication indeed does have some potential for enhancing customer satisfaction, customer trust and loyalty and customer retention, but that this is never a straightforward process; cognizance must be taken of some other variables such as quality of service, tariff, switching cost, etc which usually play their role in this process.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This research is designed as a qualitative study. It involves focus group discussion. The choice of FGD is justified given that the researcher is interested in finding out the depositions of the respondents towards the face-to-face marketing activities of the telecoms firms, and as noted by Cortesi and Gasser (2015, 1427):

“Behaviours such as decision-making processes are inherently unobservable in a research setting but can be identified through individual participants’ reflection, and the interaction between participants in focus groups allows comparisons between behaviours and preferences to be drawn during the interview. Furthermore, the qualitative interview allows participants to reflect on what is often invisible to the interviewer: their feelings, emotions, and thoughts as they reflect...” (on their experiences vis-a-vis the questions asked by the researcher).

#### **3.2. Philosophical Position**

This study has some philosophical underpinnings. These come both in the ontological and epistemological aspects.

##### **3.2.1. Ontology**

This study is based on the philosophical worldview that positions communication at the heart of all human activities. Whether this activity is political, economic, educational or cultural in nature, communication lies at the foundation of its success and failure (Murphy and Katula 1994, p.3). The ancient Greeks understood this prime position of the art of communication (rhetoric) in achieving social persuasion and Aristotle stood prominent among the early writers on this subject. According to

him, studying rhetoric helps us to differentiate between truth and falsehood, to understand how people are persuaded to act, to see both sides of issues and defend our ground in arguments with others (Murphy and Katula 1994, p.3).

This philosophical worldview has survived till date (Baran, 2010), and has occupied a prominent place in the theory and practice of various fields including marketing (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012). Among the various marketing activities is advertising which employs communication to create publicity and persuasion around a product or service with the view to achieving consumer patronage. Thus, marketing – to borrow the terminology of the ancient Greeks – is a form of rhetoric, and in this endeavour, the marketer explores various techniques in the area of content and mode of delivery to outdo competitors. Face-to-face communication comes among the various modes of delivery that the marketer might choose. The extent this mode has helped the effort of the telecommunications marketer in the South-Eastern Nigeria became the subject of this inquiry.

### **3.2.2. Epistemology**

The extent any communication has succeeded could best be viewed by observing the behaviour of the person to whom such communication has been targeted. This is based on the stimulus-response logic which implies that for one to understand how effective a stimulus has been, the natural thing is to observe the response of the receiver of the stimulus.

It is based on this epistemological proposition that this study had chosen focus group discussion as a way of data collection. This approach helps in observing “a specific population’s knowledge, attitudes toward, and behaviors regarding a given topic” (Krueger, 1998, p.1). Similarly, Koskan *et al.* (2014, p.2) support this view when they observe that FGD provides “wealth of insight into motivation, attitudes, feeling and behaviour that cannot easily be obtained by quantitative methods alone.” Thus, to understand the feelings, attitudes and behaviours which the face-to-face communication of the telecommunications firms in the South-Eastern Nigeria may have provoked or failed to provoke in the audience, the FGD session provides a convenient and handy tool which would draw from out from the audience their experiences in terms of their response to the said communication. The researcher serves as an observer watching the respondents as they, through exchange of views and arguments, help each other in articulating their feelings, attitudes and behaviours.

### **3.3. Area of Study**

The area of is the South-East Nigeria. It is one of the six geopolitical zones of the country comprising five states as follows: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. This zone is made up of **16, 395, 555** people going by the 2006 national population census results (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Nigeria as a whole boast of the largest telecommunications market in Africa (Omo-Ettu et al, 2007; Juwah, 2011). The market has as its major players as local and foreign telecommunication firms, which all operate under the oversight of a government regulator – the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). It is a highly competitive sector where rival firms are continuously involved in various forms of marketing aimed at gaining and retaining customers. The South-East zone hosts some major cities which are some of the hubs of telecommunication activities in the country; they include Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, Aba, Umuahia, Nnewi, Okigwe, Abakaliki, Nnewi, among others. Consequently, this zone is considered a fair representation of Nigeria's telecommunications industry.

### **3.4. Population of Study**

The study population is all members of the population of the South-East Nigeria who are up to 18 years of age. In other words, all individuals who are above the childhood ages as defined in the Nigeria's *Child Rights Act*; they number **11, 382, 323**, according to official statistics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Members of this population are presumed to be the mature and self-dependent segment of the society, and legally speaking are those qualified to enter into commercial transaction. Being that this study is related to commercial activities, this population is taken to be appropriate for this study.

### **3.5. Sample and Sampling Procedure**

This study does not involve the entire population, but chooses a sample. Twelve respondents are selected from the population. The selection is purposive taking into consideration the demographics of age and gender which both need to be represented in the sample for a balanced result. There will be two focus groups each comprising six respondents of three males and three females. While one of the groups comprises people of 18 years to 45; the other comprises those of 46 and above, in order to reflect the age variations of the population.

### **3.6. Instrument of Data Collection**

For the FGD, the data collection instrument was focus group discussion guide. The discussion guide comprised questions, which the discussion moderator would raise at the discussion sessions, as well as points he would look out for in the contributions of the discussants.

### **3.7. Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher moderates each of the two discussion sessions. A note-taker and an observer assist him. The discussions are recorded using a tape recorder while the note-taker takes important notes. The moderator introduces each topic in the form of a question while the discussants make their contributions discursively. The sessions are held at any time between the hours of 9am to 6pm on the chosen day preferably weekend. This is to suit the schedules of the respondents who might be engaged with their respective work on weekdays. Each session will last for 90 minutes. Further, the researcher ensures that the respondents are first educated on what is being done and what is expected of them and will be assured of anonymity in order to secure maximum cooperation.

## **4. Data Presentation and Analysis**

Two focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were held in two selected states of the South-East Nigeria. The states were Anambra State (where the town of Onitsha hosted the session) and Enugu State (where the discussion was conducted in the town of Enugu). Each session comprised 6 discussants each, making a total of 12 discussants. The Onitsha session was held on Saturday 27 June, 2015 while that of Enugu was conducted on Saturday July 4, 2015. The discussion sessions lasted roughly 90 minutes each.

The discussants for the Onitsha session comprised a banker, a teacher, two traders, an artisan and a student. (Onitsha is dominated by trading, hence the higher representation given to traders). There were three males and three females among the discussants while their ages were 21, 32, 48, 49, 53 and 61.

For the Enugu session, the discussants comprised two civil servants, two students, a trader and a self-employed legal practitioner. (Civil servants and students received higher representation due to their relative high number in the town). Their ages were 19, 26, 33, 46, 50 and 51. Analysis of the data collected via the discussion sessions are done under the following themes and sub-themes:

- Exposure to face-to-face marketing
- Attention to face-to-face marketing communication
- Persuasiveness of face-to-face marketing
- Face-to-Face Marketing versus Mediated Marketing

#### **4.1. Exposure to Face-To-Face Marketing**

The respondents noted their constant exposure to face-to-face marketing communication of the telecommunications firms. They said that their encounter with the marketing agents of the telecommunications firms occurs quite regularly and at different places. Vera said, *“I see them every day, going to school, at motor parks while boarding buses... It’s something I see every time.”* Similarly, Mike noted *“The marketing agents are everywhere now that it has become difficult or even impossible for one to avoid meeting them.”*

In the course of the discussions, it was revealed that the marketing agents usually position themselves at strategic spots where it becomes easy for them to meet as many people as possible. Such points include places like entrances to markets, campus gates, motor parks, amusement parks, fuelling stations, etc. Nneoma observed as follows:

In my campus, I would say that it is quite likely for anyone who comes to school regularly to encounter these marketers time and again because they are always found around the school gate accosting those coming into and leaving the campus. In fact, you do not need to be observant to encounter them and fortunately or unfortunately they might walk up to you to talk to you... Also, you are likely to find them within the school particularly around the areas such as bus stands where students usually congregate because sometimes they erect their stands at these busy places marketing their products.

Dom equally relayed his own experience as a person who usually goes to markets. *“I observe them stationed close to the market entrance particularly in the mornings and evenings.”* Vera recalled that recently, one of the telecoms firms sponsored a musical event and the entrance to the venue became *“a hub of marketing activities as guests inevitably encountered the agents who were colourfully clad and quite courteous.”*

However, it was also discovered in the course of the discussions that the face-to-face marketers do not just wait for people to come by them but actually *“chase”* after people to compel their attention. In other words, they do not only position themselves at strategic points waiting for people, they also walk

up to people who might be engaged in one personal thing or the other. For instance, Jude recalled as follows:

“I remember being at a shop waiting for someone and one of the marketers walked up to me and started talking to me even before I realized that someone was standing beside me. I was almost scared and embarrassed before I realized her mission. I can also recall once or twice that these marketing agents had run into me as I waited for a bus at a bus stand. Initially, I had thought that he was coming to board a bus like me...”

Chioma recalled how one of the face-to-face marketing agents had run up to her and continued to follow her even at her own displeasure. *“He followed me to the bus stop to the extent that I got annoyed,”* she stated emotionally. Ebuka and Jude equally relayed similar experiences where face-to-face marketing agents at a restaurant had met them while they were eating. *“Two of the agents – a young man and a young woman – kept me company all through the time my meal lasted and even after that”,* Jude recalled. Priscilla said *“the last time I encountered them, it was in a shop; they came to meet me while I was seated chatting with the shopkeeper.”*

From the foregoing, the following points are extracted: (1) that everyone among the respondents has experienced face-to-face marketing from the service providers; (2) that this exposure is recurring from time to time; (3) that respondents meet the marketing agents along the roads, at motor parks, bus stops, markets, campuses, etc; and (3) that all this leads to the verdict that the respondents are highly exposed to face-to-face marketing.

#### **4.2. Attention to Face-To-Face Marketing Communication**

Regarding how much attention the discussants pay to face-to-face marketing communication, there were generally no straightforward answers. The respondents noted that paying attention to such communication would depend on a number of factors.

According to Kodilinye *“I pay attention to them (face-to-face marketing agents) depending on my schedule and mood.”*

Ify similarly stated:

“I could pay attention to such depending on where I am at a particular point in time. For instance, I might be more willing to listen to a marketer when I am relaxed at a place or while taking a walk than

when I am rushing to a place urgently... It all depends on the circumstance, just as circumstance could dictate how disposed you are to pay attention to a billboard or poster while walking along the road.”

Vera informed that she pays most likely when she is settled at a place:

“I can recall when I was seated at a booksellers stall on my campus and a marketer came. I think we gave him all the attention and even enjoyed our chat with him. I guess it is a good strategy for them to meet people while they are settled as against interrupting people’s movement or distracting one from a task... I guess some of them have learnt and are pursuing this strategy because by my experience I believe it works.”

Like Kodilinye, Jude and Chigozie testified that their paying attention to the face-to-face marketers is a function of their mood. *“If I am in the mood to listen I simply listen. That’s all I can say on that,”* Chigozie said.

However, the respondents generally agreed that there is always a compelling motivation to pay attention to the marketers when one is in need of certain information that he/she believes they might possess. Chioma said that she had, on a number of occasions, had cause to seek for information from a face-to-face marketing agent:

“I think one of them was regarding an Internet data package that I had seen on television or elsewhere but needed to know more about it. So, when I saw the agents along the road, I had to on my own seek the attention of one of them to ask about the package... I believe many people have reason to do this from time to time.”

Interestingly, this reflects the experiences of most of the respondents, particularly the youth among them. They noted that the telecoms service providers usually introduce new packages from time to time requiring that one sometimes needs clarifications regarding them. Mike said that he had occasions *“to enquire about some packages which I felt would be of need to me. Usually they concern Internet connectivity because I need the Internet always.”* Priscilla related this particular experience of hers:

“I was once passing by a motor park and saw a group of marketers speaking to people individually. I overheard one of them talking about the Glo overload thing (a recharging package by one of the service providers *Glo*). I immediately sought his attention because I had continuously seen this package advertised and it appeared interesting to me. I wanted him to educate me more on that but it appeared he did not know much about it because he directed me to their office.”

Also, the discussants observed that one might have a problem which solution he/she might want to find out from the marketers, compelling his/her to seek their attention. Three of them; Kodilinye and Dom said they have had this experience.

From the foregoing, the following points are extracted: (1) the respondents pay attention to face-to-face marketing communication and also do ignore it depending on circumstances; (2) that the factors influencing such attention include mood of a respondent at any given time of exposure, his/her schedule and interest in the subject of the communication; (3) and that all this ultimately suggests that whether and the extent the respondents pay attention to face-to-face marketing communication is moderated by certain variables as might be applicable.

### **4.3. Persuasiveness of Face-To-Face Marketing**

To what extent are the discussants persuaded by the messages of face-to-face marketing agents of the telecoms service providers? The respondents did not give any one-way response as they noted certain variables that would determine whether they would be persuaded or not. These variables could be categorized under credibility and brand attachment/brand profitability.

#### **4.3.1. Credibility**

Interestingly, views expressed by the discussants strongly revealed that credibility factor has been the major obstacle to persuasion in their encounter with the face-to-face marketers. The discussants appeared decidedly skeptical about the promotional messages of the marketers. Chioma said:

“I think they lie. One of the networks (name withheld by the researcher) said they are the best but my experience says otherwise. They lie on data bundle and other aspects of their services. So, I ask myself why should I believe them?”

Jude said he is always afraid that such firms (such as telecoms service providers) “*are always out to make money and so could do anything to achieve that sole purpose... So I am always cautious about what they say about their products.*” Most of the respondents tended to agree with this view, noting that their experience of the quality of service of the telecoms firms make them develop misgivings about whatever good thing the firms might have to say about their products and services.

Thus, poor quality service stands out as the seeming major source of the respondents’ doubts. Nneoma observes:



“The service has been poor generally. It appears as if the service providers are claiming one thing and the subscribers are experiencing a different thing. I do not want to say that they are deliberately deceiving us but that they appear deluded, not wanting to come to terms with their shortcomings... Whatever be the case, the outcome is that someone like me doesn't seem convinced when they make their splendid claims... and I can confidently guess that it is the experience of most persons.”

Such a view from the discussants might not be unexpected against the backdrop of the fact that the poor service has been a major problematic issue in the Nigeria's telecoms industry. So prominent has this problem been that in 2007 it attracted the intervention of the nation's legislature (Sesan and Omo-Ettu, 2007, p. 1). Notwithstanding, the problem has remained a perennial one.

#### **4.3.2. Brand Attachment/Brand Profitability**

Another important variable that seem to have strongly influenced persuasion among the respondents is brand attachment. By this is meant the extent a subscriber is at home (or attached to) a given brand such that he/she tends to be unwilling to be swayed by the marketing messages of rival brands. Thus, one just feels emotionally attached to the service provider he/she has become used to. Dom had said, *“I like using one SIM so cannot because of their marketing go for another SIM.”* In the same vein, Vera said, *“I am in love with MTN (one of the service providers). Whatever they tell me, I tend to give it a trial. It appears that I wish to go on with that network for now.”* For Jude also, it is a matter of pure attachment to the brand he has used for long:

“The first time I subscribed for a telecoms service it was MTN and since then I have stuck to it. I can't really say that they offer the best service vis-s-vis other networks, but I just do not feel disposed to change from the network that I have got used to.”

There was also the issue of uncertainty. Dom said, *“Usually one is not too certain as to what he will experience with another service provider. So, he might just decide to stick with what he is used to.”* The discussants generally agreed with this sentiment, noting that since the problem of poor quality of service is general with all service providers, one might not be sure as to where something better might lie.

However, some of the respondents said they prefer a particular brand due to one form of profitability or the other they have observed in it. Ify said *“I am satisfied with what I am offered by my network*

*Glo... I think it is the most economical in the country.*” Similarly, Ebuka described the network he uses as *“the best”* insisting *“I have not seen any reason yet to change to another one.”*

In effect, the discussants were insisting that since they have personally experienced satisfaction with their favourite brand, they would not be willing to change their brand loyalty just for the reason of being spoken to by face-to-face marketing agents. The same sentiment appeared evident with the discussants who admitted that they would stick to their favourite brand due to sheer attachment to it. However, the discussants admitted that they are more disposed to paying attention to marketing agents of their favourite network and trying out what they offer than those of *“strange”* networks. Vera for instance, with reference to her favourite network, said, *“Whatever they tell me I would like to try it.”*

Chigozie said:

*“Once you are attached to a particular network, you feel willing to know the latest offer or improvement; you feel belonged and involved; you know you have a stake. This has been my experience...”*

Nevertheless, though the discussants appeared to be generally reluctant to leave their favourite brands, the discussions revealed that most of them in fact use more than one brand – with one typically serving as the favourite. A good number of them admitted to have made their subscriptions for their alternative brands through the face-to-face marketing agents. Priscilla said:

*“You know there is always a need for alternative, particularly since one cannot vouch for the reliability of any particular network... I have three phones and I use three different lines, though my main line is Etisalat others serve as some form of back-up. I can recall I purchased one of the lines – not the main line – from the face-to-face marketers.”*

Interestingly, only two discussants said they have changed from one favourite brand to another. However, they stated that they did this after they had given the two brands a trial and discovered that one was *“better”* than the other – and not because they had encountered a face-to-face marketing agent.

From the foregoing, the following points are extracted: (1) the respondents might believe or doubt the messages of face-to-face marketing communication depending on given circumstances; (2) that major factors hindering believability belief are respondents’ negative perception of the service providers based on their recurring experience of poor service, their attachment to a particular brand and their

perceived brand profitability; (3) and that from all these, it is summarized that success of face-to-face marketing by the telecoms service providers might not depend only on the medium and message content but on some extrinsic factors.

#### **4.4. Face-To-Face Marketing versus Mediated Marketing**

At the Onitsha session of the focus group discussion, there was an initial disagreement among the respondents as to which is more effective between face-to-face marketing and mediated marketing. (By mediated marketing is meant marketing communication conveyed through mass media or other communication media as against face-to-face communication). However, they eventually agreed, like the Enugu session discussants, that both forms of communication are mutually complementary.

They noted that face-to-face marketing helps to bring products and services of service providers to the doorsteps of subscribers and potential subscribers. *“When you see their offer on TV you might not know exactly where to go to get it, but with face-to-face marketing, the offer is brought to you directly as an individual,”* Mike said. According to Jude, *“you might not have time to go to their office to purchase their products or make subscriptions, but their marketers solve all that for you.”* Nneoma informed that face-to-face marketing gives one an advantage of better understanding. *“Since the person communicating with you is there with you, you have the opportunity of asking questions for further clarifications,”* she said.

The discussants affirmatively agreed that face-to-face marketing lends itself to verification. Vera said that it affords her the opportunity of instantly verifying the claim of telecoms firms:

*“Whenever I meet them (marketers), whatever they tell me (regarding their service or promo), I like to try it right there to verify whether it really works. For instance, if they say with this amount of recharge I would get this amount of data, I would, if possible, do the recharge there and then to verify.”*

In the same vein, the discussants referred particularly to the sort of face-to-face marketing that involves promos where people win prizes, agreeing that these promos become more credible in face-to-face situation. According to Kodilinye, *“when you see people win incredible prizes in real time before your very eyes, you just can’t doubt anymore.”* This sentiment was general among the discussants of the two focus groups. The reason might not be unconnected with the lingering controversy over the genuineness of the promos offered by telecommunications service providers in Nigeria, which on a

number of occasions has attracted the intervention of the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) and the Consumer Protection Council (CPC).

From the foregoing, the following points are extracted: in the opinion of the respondents, face-to-face marketing in comparison with mediated marketing has the advantage of bringing marketing messages to the doorsteps of consumers; making for immediate and on-the-spot feedback; and allowing instant verification of claims.

## **5. Limitation of Study**

This study was limited by the non-statistical nature of its data. This meant that the research cannot make precise affirmations on certain things such as the proportion of the study population that is exposed to face-to-face marketing, the frequency of such exposure, and the proportion of the population that reacted (positively or negatively) to such communication. Thus, the study would have been richer if a triangulated approach that integrates a quantitative design is included to complement the FGD procedure.

In the same vein, the fact that the study used just 12 respondents for a population that runs into millions might have limited the extent to which the findings could be generalised to the entire population.

Also, there is a dearth of local literature (from Nigeria) on the subject of face-to-face marketing both in general and in regard to the telecommunications service providers in particular. This denied the study some conceptual and empirical backgrounding that could have enriched it.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this research, it may be concluded that face-to-face marketing would be a viable alternative for customer base building and maintaining customer relations. However, just like in other forms of marketing communication, this would not occur in a vacuum – as there are intervening variables that might enhance or undermine the strength of face-to-face communication in serving this purpose. This echoes the findings of media richness theory studies by Van der Kleij *et al.* (2009), Wakefield *et al.* (2008), Montoya *et al.* (2009) Dennis and Valacich (1999), and Sevinc and D'Ambra (2012) which suggest that no medium could as a matter of certainty be adjudged rich or lean based on its intrinsic characteristics as this judgment would invariably depend on some extrinsic variables around specific communication situations. Admittedly, however, the findings of our research still strongly suggest that face-to-face marketing has its own cutting edge or advantage, thus seemingly

affirming the original position of the media richness theory (Montoya et al, 2009; Miles, 2012). But whether when all factors considered, face-to-face marketing would be a more effective strategy than other forms of marketing remains an unanswered question. This would definitely require further research effort. Nevertheless, it would remain a worthwhile strategy for the telecoms companies in Nigeria to continue to integrate it to serve as a complement to other marketing forms; which will produce a synergy that will boost their effort towards consolidating and enhancing their market presence.

## **7. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

Telecommunication firms in the South-Eastern Nigeria should make effort to address their shortcomings particularly in the areas of quality of service. This way, they would be able to gain the credibility required for optimizing the potentials of face-to-face marketing. Similarly, they should always try to be honest in their communications as perceived dishonesty ultimately undermines persuasion in communication. It is evident from the views of the respondents that there is perceived dishonesty around the communications coming from the telecoms service providers.

It will also serve the interest of the telecoms service providers if they appraise their face-to-face marketing activities and strategies to identify possible areas of improvement. This way, they could optimize the gains of this form of marketing.

Towards better realizing the complementary relationship between mass media marketing and interpersonal marketing, telecommunications firms should evolve strategies towards using mass media marketing to mobilize the audience for face-to-face marketing. For instance, at the end of a television or radio advertisement on say a new package, something like this could be inserted – “You are encourage to speak with our mobile marketing agents for more information.” This way, there could be the possibility that some members of the audience would on their own seek to be engaged by the face-to-face marketing agents.

There is need to conduct a quantitative study to complement this research through generating statistics that would give precise picture of the role face-to-face marketing might have played in the telecoms sector in the South-Eastern Nigeria. Such statistical data would offer more definite insight that would be of help to both the telecoms players and scholarship.

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